

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

March 2, 2021

In Attendance:

Members Present: Chairperson Ann Smith, Larry Chapman, Barry Mitchell, and Mayor Janet Winkler

Others Present: Town Manager, Rebecca Bentley, Chief of Police, Richard Blevins and Town Clerk, Tammy Swanson

Call to Order:

Chairperson Ann Smith called the meeting to order.

Huss Avenue:

Chief Blevins presented information about problems with traffic and the width of the street on Huss Ave. Eddie Bolick, an apartment owner on Huss Avenue, has issued a complaint that Huss Avenue is so narrow that people traveling the speed limit pose a hazard to the people exiting his apartments. Mr. Bolick also complained about the volume of traffic on the Huss Avenue. Chief Blevins stated that his Department has watched the traffic on Huss Avenue, and has also conducted traffic studies on the street. The findings were that average speed is reasonable – 18 mph. People use Huss Ave. as a shortcut to access Mt. Herman Road and travel on to Hwy. 321. The typical route is Legion Rd., to Mathewson St., to Huss Ave., to Mt. Herman Rd., and then Hwy. 321. Chief Blevins stated that there have been some accidents on Huss Ave., but not a tremendous amount. He also talked about a limited line of sight at the Mathewson St./Legion Road intersection. Legion Road is one of the major artery for bringing people into and out of Hudson.

Chief Blevins stated that Mr. Bolick requested that the Town make Huss Ave. a one-way street. According to the study, traffic counts are about the same in both directions on the street. The average width of Huss Ave. is 14 ft. – the Town requires 20 ft. Chief Blevins stated that where the private drives connect to Huss Ave., there is a 3-inch to 4-inch drop-off from the street. This presents a problem for cars trying to pass on the street. Vehicles run off the shoulder trying to allow for safe passage.

Chief Blevins reported that between 2010 and 2020 there have been 10 crashed either on Huss Ave. or at the intersection of Mathewson St. and Legion Rd. Only one of the accidents was actually on Huss Ave., and it was a sideswipe between two vehicles.

Chief Blevins stated that in his opinion, the Town has three options to address the problem: (1)-do nothing, (2) -widen Huss Ave. or (3)- make Huss Ave. a one-way street.

Option 1 - Do nothing – Pros: no cost to the Town, no change in the citizens’ regular routines for travel, and no new complaints about changes. Cons – Does not address a legitimate complaint. With the street not meeting our own code it may send the message of “do as I say not as I do” from the Town.

Option 2 – Widen Huss Ave. – Pros: this would give vehicles more room to travel safely. Cons: adding 6 ft. of pavement when houses already have shallow yards could be an issue. Also, we are not sure about right-of-way on Huss Ave. Plus, there would be costs involved for the Town.

Option 3 – Make Huss Ave. a one-way street - Pros: eliminates the need to widen the street, cuts traffic use of the street in half. Cons: Cost of new signage, negative feedback from residents and people using the streets, and the Police Department would have to education the public about the change to a one-way street. Chief Blevins commented that this option would open the door for other neighborhoods that would like a

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one-way street, such as the Eastview Street neighborhood. Chief Blevins stated that we currently have only two one-way streets: Bean Ave and Evergreen Street.

Chief Blevins' Recommendation: The Public Safety Committee could authorize a polling of the residents on Mathewson St., Huss Ave., and North Central St. to determine what percentage of the residents would be in favor of making Huss Ave. a one-way street. This option presents a minimal cost for the Town, and fixes the majority of the problems being expressed for Huss Ave.

Rebecca asked if eliminating the no left turn at the intersection of Legion Road and Main Street would help.

Chief Blevins stated that in his opinion, doing away with the no left turn at the Legion Road/Main Street intersection would increase the number of crashes at the intersection.

Barry asked if the street has to be 20 ft. in width.

Rebecca commented that a lot of the older streets in Town do not have sufficient rights-of-way to be 20 ft. in width.

Ann asked if we have sufficient funds available to widen the street.

Rebecca stated that it could be done if necessary.

Janet commented that in her opinion, if Huss Ave. is widened, the residents of Huss Ave. would complain more, and the speed of the traffic would increase.

Larry asked how many houses are on Huss.

Chief Blevins stated that there are 7 families living on the Huss Ave.

Chief Blevins stated that he is not saying the Town needs to do something about the Huss Ave. complaints. He is just offering options if the Committee would like to address the complaints.

Janet stated that she would like to have feedback from the residents of the streets involved.

Rebecca stated that according the Caldwell County GIS, Huss Ave. has a 30 ft. right-of-way.

Ann stated that she supports the recommendation of polling the residents.

Motion: (Larry Chapman/Barry Mitchell) to accept Chief Blevins' recommendation to poll residents to see how they would feel about making Huss Ave. a one-way street, and also ask them how they feel about widening the street. Unanimously approved.

Wrecker Rotation:

Chief Blevins stated that the "word on the street" is that Keens Towing has a deal with the Town of Hudson due to the Keen family's past ties to the Town. Chief Blevins reported that Keen's Towing has now been sold, and other towing services are "coming out of the woodwork" to get on our wrecker rotation list. Chief Blevins stated that he has been contacted by a Mr. Moss who owns a wrecker services, Tucker's Towing located in Joyceton, and Matheson Towing, located in Lenoir. These companies think the door is open because the Keen family no longer owns Keen's Towing. Chief Blevins stated that his answer to these companies is that we use Keen's Towing because they provide the service we need. Chief Blevins commented that he is in the public safety business, and his intent is to clear the roads after an accident has happened as soon as possible. The longer the vehicles sit in the road plus having officers in the road, the higher likelihood that someone or something is going to be hit. In doing that, it is important to him to rely on a wrecker company that can provide the quickest service and handle any situation. Keen's is the closest to Town so they have an excellent response time, they have the equipment to move anything, they have

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adequate storage, they have as many wreckers as we could possibly need, and they do a great job clearing the road. There are other wrecker companies that are also close to Town. Tucker's Towing is close, but he is a two-wrecker company.

Chief Blevins stated that changes to how we contract wrecker services needs to come from the Board of Commissioners. This issue has been addressed 4 times since 1993. Chief Blevins stated that it is difficult for us to implement a rotation schedule due to the fact that we do not have a 24 hr. dispatcher. Also, we have young officers working at night, and having them look after an accident, plus keep up with a wrecker rotation is asking a lot. Caldwell County does use a rotation; however, they have 24 hr. dispatcher to keep up with the rotation. We could use the County dispatcher and their rotation; however, a wrecker service from anywhere in the county could be called. Chief Blevins stated that in his opinion, if you wreck in Hudson, your vehicle should be towed from a Hudson area service, and stored at a Hudson area storage. Granite Falls has a rotation policy, and they have a 24 hr. dispatcher. Lenoir also has a wrecker policy, and also has a 24 hr. dispatcher. Chief Blevins stated that the bottom line is that he wants to clear the road as soon as possible, and Keens is able to do that with no problems.

Larry asked if the people involved in the accidents get to request a wrecker service.

Chief Blevins stated that the driver always has an option for who they would like to get the vehicle. If they can get there in 20 minutes, we allow them to call. The only time we automatically call Keen's is if the driver is taken to the hospital, and there is no one to make a decision. The only other time is when a car breaks down in the turning lane of the highway and is left – we call Keens. He stated that the officers do not impose Keens on anyone - there is always the option of another service as long as the vehicle can be moved in a timely and safe manner.

Janet stated that we need to convey to these other companies that we do not have a 24 hr. dispatcher, and our officers do not have information readily available for other services. Also, Keen's has the equipment to handle any situation. She stated that we need to explain that we have to think about our officers and the people involved in the wreck.

Barry stated that his top priority is the same - we need to look after our officers and the people in the accident. Also we need to make sure the area is cleaned up adequately. Barry also mentioned that the curse of a rotation is that sometimes not all of the parties wanting to be involved handle things the same.

Chief Blevins stated that he has kept an eye on Keen's since the ownership has changed, and he sees no difference to this point.

Ann stated that she has heard for years that we show partiality to Keen's, however, Chief Blevins has made a case.

Rebecca stated that the highway patrol has a list of wrecker services they use; however, the wrecker services have to meet certain specifications to even be put on the list. The highway patrol calls it a zone – which is the service area, plus other requirements to qualify. Rebecca suggested that we could also require that a wrecker service be able to meet certain requirements to be on our list. The officer could then keep up with the list on their in-car computers.

Motion: (Larry Chapman/Barry Mitchell) to direct Chief Blevins and Rebecca to make a list of requirements for wrecker services, and when this is done, we'll listen to the wrecker services.

Unanimously approved.

Another meeting will be scheduled after the requirements are approved.

Speed Humps:

Richard stated that he and Norman have been in contact with 3 paving companies to discuss turning speed humps into speed tables. Speed tables are wider and longer than a speed hump. The three companies are Evans Paving and Construction, Reginald Yount, and Hoffman Paving.

The following quotes were given:

- Evans Paving – \$16,000 - very much on board with the project, and they understood what we wanted.
- Reginald Yount – \$7,000
- Hoffman – no response

Chief Blevins stated that since the Reginald Yount offer was so much lower than Evans Construction, they are going to meet again with Mr. Yount to make sure he understands what we want.

Rebecca stated that she knows Mr. Yount, and he is interested in getting paving jobs in Hudson. He may just want to give us a good deal.

Barry asked if either of these companies has built a speed table before.

Chief Blevins stated that Evans Construction has built them before, and they seem to understand what we want. He said he was not sure about Mr. Yount.

It was the consensus of the Committee to direct Chief Blevins to go with the company he believes would do the best job, and that he feels comfortable working with.

Employee Recruitment/Retention:

Chief Blevins stated that to his knowledge, none of his officers are unhappy working for Hudson. However, we have entered into a time where there are not replacements for police officers. Out of the programs we farm from, only one of the BLET programs has any students – Western Piedmont Community College. Out of the 12 students in the program, some are pre-hires for Hickory, and the others are spoken for by other police departments that do the pre-hire program. We currently have one position open, and we have received 4 applications; however, none of applications are of the quality we expect. The next BLET class will be starting in August 2021, which means the students would graduate this December. Chief Blevins stated that although there is an agreement between the agencies in the County that we do not recruit from each other, we cannot stop officers from going to other agencies for more money.

Chief Blevins stated that we have great equipment, a great training program, the work environment is great, and a take-home car policy; however, when we go to recruit, potential officers look at money. And some from other agencies can't afford to come here.

Rebecca commented that although we have great benefits, the benefits do not pay the bills. Plus, a lot of these officers are just starting out their lives, and they need to cover their finances.

The Committee discussed the pay scale for the Police Department.

Ann stated that she appreciated the information, which will be discussed in more detail during the budget process.

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Chief Blevins stated that working the road takes top priority in Hudson. Currently, the night shift position at CCC & TI is not being covered, and that officer is now working the road due to our shortage of staff. The day shift college position will be the next place to pull from, and the last place will be the position at Hudson Middle School.

The Committee discussed how proud they are of the level of professionalism our Police Department shows, and they want to do whatever possible to keep it that way.

Gas Card Changes:

Chief Blevins stated that we are having a lot of trouble with our Fuelman Gas Cards, and we are planning to try a company called WEX, Inc. He stated that Fuelman is one of the less accepted fuel cards, which poses a problem when officers go out of town to school, and they have cut us off in the past due to problems with billing. Fuelman gives a bigger discount than WEX, but the discount does not seem to be worth the trouble they cause. He explained that the change would include the Recreation Department and Public Works Department as well.

Next Meeting Scheduled:

The next Public Safety Committee Meeting was scheduled for March 23, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. at the Town Hall.

Adjournment:

Motion: (Larry Chapman/Barry Mitchell) to adjourn the meeting. Unanimously approved.

Tamra T. Swanson, Town Clerk